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BRITISH AND AMERICAN APPROACHES TO THE PEACE

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This paper is based upon the assumption that a first essential for a stable and enduring peace is the achievement of unity in policy and programme by Great Britain and the United States. It is based further upon the recognition that differences in viewpoint between representative and parallel groups in Britain and the United States are wider and more fundamental than is often admitted in either country, and that frank confrontation and fuller understanding of these differences are prerequisite to the achievement of the desired unity in action.

These differences spring partly from conflicts in immediate national interest. But they arise also partly from dissimilarities in national temperament. In part, they reflect contrasted experiences with government—both their own governments and rule over subject peoples. Behind these contrasts again lie even more fundamental divergences in the understanding of man, and of the fashion in which, because of man's nature, government should be ordered.

In so far as deviations in British and American policy represent conflicts in national interest, agreement must be reached, if it can be attained at all, by political compromise. That is the task of statesmen. But in so far as divergences spring from the deeper levels of contrasts in temperament, in past political experience, or in philosophical outlook, there is a task in mutual understanding in which Christians of the two countries may take an important share.

The British constitutional system, with the empire it governs, has grown like Topsy. Hence the British aversion to blueprints, the British distrust of written instruments of government. So progressive an outlook as that of the sponsors of Political and Economic Planning feels no hesitancy in dogmatizing about the peace :—

> " The post-war settlement of Europe should be along the lines of the British Commonwealth rather than a written constitution. . . . It would be against all the weight of the only successful experience of creating a Commonwealth of free nations if we were to begin with any attempt to devise a European written constitution. It would be unfortunate if Britain were to substitute for her own tested methods an approach based largely upon obsolete political thought."

Such a declaration blandly ignores the fact that both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. are federations of previously independent states knit into unity by written constitutions, not to speak of the fact that several of the British Dominions have so far departed from the maternal example as to cement their unity and freeze their governmental structures by written constitutions.

Again, the characteristic British method of advance is by trial and error. British development has been marked by few drastic changes, but by steady experimental growth. Hence the British distaste for the radically different and the drastically new, their natural employment of conceptions which are organic, developmental. Furthermore, this pragmatic cast of mind leads the British to be indifferent, if not suspicious, toward broad general declarations of political principle, cast in ideal or normative terms. In all these respects, the British viewpoint speaks out of an experience of centuries. And it speaks out of experience in government across the earth and over many peoples.

In contrast, the American people speak out of political knowledge to be measured in decades rather than centuries, from the perspective of a nation born full-grown in revolution, and from experience confined almost entirely to a single continent. To the British misgiving of sudden change, they point to their own origins in answer—not to speak of the example of the French and Russian Revolutions. To the British antipathy toward written instruments of government, they reply by citing their own experience under a written constitution—a method which they would hardly recognize as wholly "obsolete."

There is also a characteristic contrast between British and Americans in scale of values of which full account must be taken. It is epitomized in the relative weight to be given to *law* and *liberty*. Each people cherishes both values, but there can be no question as to the preeminence accorded them in both the regard and the practice of the respective nations. To the British public, American equanimity in the face of the successive epidemics of "carpet-baggers," "robber barons," "bootleggers" and "kidnappers" must seem quite incomprehensible evidence of retarded development in a people otherwise approaching cultural maturity. The existence of such groups within modern Britain is unthinkable. To Americans, the acquiescence in fixed social stratifications which has been so characteristic of British middle and working classes has often appeared inexplicable.

Behind divergences in political practice and experience are almost always to be discovered contradictions, often covert, in basic philosophical and theological presuppositions. So it is here. Historically, British and American political outlooks are rooted in contrasted views of human nature.

It is not fortuitous that Anglican theology is prevailingly Arminian *and* that the British mind entertains a high estimate of the capacity of the strong and the advanced to govern and lead the backward or the weak. To the same strain of presupposition must be traced the profound British conviction that responsible authority should be directly proportional to power. For example, those nations upon whom in the last analysis will fall the task of policing world peace should be charged with authority in the direction of world order.

The view of human nature implicit in the traditional American view, though seldom made explicit or even acknowledged by most Americans, is more pessimistic as regards the strong, more hopeful as regards the backward. It is little known in Britain, as it is little remembered in the United States, that not one but two traditions of political

theory stand in the American tradition, and that they are rooted in antipodal views of man. In the great Declaration, Jefferson voiced the faith of the age of Romanticism and Revolution. But when the hour came to give the new nation its structure of government, the task was entrusted to James Madison. He sought to buttress the hard-won liberties of men by vigorous safeguards—safeguards which he had learned to recognize as necessary under the tutelage of that stern Calvinist, John Witherspoon.[1] The Constitution itself, with its appended Bill of Rights, is the most basic of these safeguards. And under the Constitution, the American government was deliberately constructed upon a system of "checks and balances," rooted in profound distrust of human nature, especially of the wielders of power.

These historical, temperamental and ideological differences affect the attitudes with which Americans and British approach every major problem of the peace. Take, for illustration, the future of subject peoples. Apart from considerations of national interest, which almost always bulk larger than even the most sophisticated Britisher recognizes, and apart from assumptions of the beneficence of British rule, almost always loftier than a dispassionate appraisal can fully justify, the British attitude is governed mainly by three presuppositions already noted—supreme valuation of law and justice, confidence in natural evolutionary development, distrust of the uneducated and the unprivileged.

In contrast, Americans are quick in sympathy for young and ill-favoured peoples, having so recently themselves emerged from very modest beginnings. They entertain higher confidence in the potentialities of these peoples, once free, to work out a worthy destiny, having themselves hewn a continental empire out of intractable circumstance. They are less alarmed at the prospect of disorder during transition as they contemplate not only their own history, but also the glorious outcome of China's birththroes these recent decades.

But the American attitude is grounded not merely in a somewhat sentimental faith in the weak and the backward. It springs equally from a realistic distrust of the strong and the mature.

No feature of the present colonial discussions is more wounding to British pride than that their professions of intention toward their subject peoples should be accepted at less than face-value not only by Indians and Malayans, but even by Americans. They regard this as a direct reflection upon British integrity. Their natural resentment might be considerably eased if they realized that American scepticism rises not from a jaundiced judgment upon any one nation, but rather from an understanding of human nature deeply rooted in Christian faith and strongly confirmed by self-knowledge. For thirty-five years the United States gave general assurances of ultimate independence to the Phillipines. It is safe to say that these promises were never regarded as secure guarantees, not only by the Filipinos but by Americans themselves, until they were embodied in a precise pledge definitely dated. Americans did not trust the genuineness of their own professions until they were irrevocably sealed by specific commitments. Their misgivings about British intentions do not mean that they view the

[1] No student of American government has expounded this fact more acutely than Lord Bryce. See his *The American Commonwealth*, Vol. I, p. 306.

British less highly than themselves, but only that they view them no more highly.

Differences in outlook which bear especially upon the problem of world order have already been suggested—the worth of broad idealistic declarations, the value of written instruments of government, drastic change versus gradual experimental advance. Here we meet the contrast between the two main schools of thought on the organization of peace—those who espouse a single over-all solution and those who argue for a policy of piecemeal solutions of specific problems. While there are supporters of each method on both sides of the Atlantic, on the whole American idealism leans to radical novelty and over-all solutions, British sentiment toward "piecemeal" pragmatic adjustments.

These two view-points have been analysed and illustrated as though they were representative of British and American opinion respectively. Any such presentation, if left without further comment, would be seriously misleading in two respects. First, while the "gradualist" philosophy is more typically British than American, it also controls the thinking of large numbers of the best informed and most influential students of the world-scene in the United States. Second, and much more important, we have spoken as though gradualism were the British philosophy, the New Deal that of the United States. But we have been speaking solely of political reordering. The most significant paradox is that in Britain it is widely assumed that we are going forward to radical reordering of economic and social life, while there is a preference for slow and careful readjustments in international arrangements. In the United States there is a cry for a New Order internationally, but in the matter of domestic economy the forces of reaction have already powerfully set in. In brief, each nation desires radical change where it has no present interest at stake, or where its own interests counsel such change; each nation favours gradualism where its own interests appear imperilled.

Thus we are brought to a final observation. If I may be permitted to repeat words written on return from Britain a year and a half ago which seem to me no less true to-day: "In the making of peace, the significant divisions will not be, as will be made to appear, between victors and vanquished, or even between nations allied in victory. The real divisions will be *within* each nation. . . . The great necessity is that we should discern clearly where our real problem lies—not between nations, but within each nation; that we should acknowledge that the bonds uniting like-purposed people of every nation are more intimate and more commanding of allegiance than those which join us with fellow-countrymen; that we should have thought our way through to a common mind as to the peace we seek; and then that we should struggle shoulder to shoulder within our respective nations for the actual achievement of the common goals, lest mankind's hopes again suffer shipwreck."

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